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IFAS EXTENSION

Friday's Feature

By

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Lovebugs take flight along the Gulf Coast

Lovebugs are once again invading our lives along the Gulf Coast. As these tiny flies begin their second seasonal mating flight of the year, they create quite a mess as they splatter on the fronts of vehicles.

The lovebug, whose scientific name is *Plecia nearctica*, was first identified in southeastern Texas and has migrated naturally along the Gulf of Mexico. The first reports of lovebugs in Florida were made in 1947 from Escambia County.

It has been erroneously reported that lovebugs were introduced into Florida by the University of Florida and USDA entomologists. However, lovebugs were well established in Florida before any research was conducted on them by the UF or USDA scientists.

Twice a year, large adult populations occur. The spring flight occurs in May and the second flight occurs in September. These mating flights extend over periods of four to five weeks. During the mating process, the male lovebug attaches to the female lovebug and only disengages during the daytime while resting on vegetation—never during flight or at night. The female lovebug dies within 86 hours of laying eggs.



Females may lay as many as 350 eggs which are usually deposited on decaying plant material. The larvae, or immature lovebugs, feed on decaying plant material and live on the soil surface just beneath the decaying organic matter.

Lovebug larvae perform an environmentally beneficial function. They are organic recyclers--converting dead plant material into organic components which can be used again by growing plants.

Adult lovebugs are harmless and do not sting or bite. They feed on the nectar of various plants, especially goldenrod. Adults seem attracted to bright white and yellow objects. Usually, lovebug flights are restricted to daylight hours and temperatures above 68 degrees F. At night, lovebugs rest on low growing vegetation.

Lovebugs can be a considerable nuisance to motorists. Research has shown that automobile fumes, heat from the engines and the vibrations of the vehicles themselves all attract lovebugs which accounts for the numerous

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splatters on vehicles. Large numbers of lovebugs can sometimes cause overheating of engines, reduce visibility, and etch automobile paint.

The body fluids are slightly acidic. If the body parts are allowed to remain on the car for several days, bacterial action increases the acidity and etches the paint. A soaking with water for about five minutes followed by a scrubbing within 15 to 20 minutes should remove most of the lovebugs without harm to automobile paint. A hood air deflector or screen will reduce the number of splattered lovebugs on an automobile.

A number of insecticides have been evaluated for effectiveness in controlling lovebug larvae and adults. Most of them kill lovebugs but are impractical because high populations of the insects occur over vast areas of the state.

Although chemical controls are impractical, some natural controls do exist. These include natural predators, a low amount of rainfall, as well as several types of fungi that influence mortality rate upon ingestion.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>